

THE NOVEMBER MAGAZINES.

From the highly suggestive article entitled "The Small Sins of Congress," we quote as follows:—
Strollers about the Capitol at Washington frequently pause to admire the ingenuity and the studious habits of a certain respectable colored man who serves as doorkeeper to an august national court. It is an established principle at Washington that an American citizen visiting the capital of his beloved country shall never be allowed to open a door for himself; and consequently, wherever there is a door, there must needs be a doorkeeper. A being more superstitious than a doorkeeper to the room in which this high court is held it would be difficult to imagine. The door has been provided by a magnificent nation with a convenient loop or handle of brass, adapted to the meanest capacity, and with a spring which causes it gently to close without the interposition of human hands. It closes, too, upon something soft, so that there is no danger of the deliberations of the court being disturbed by a bang. Most of the persons who enter the room are familiar with all its arrangements; and if their hands should chance to be full of papers, they could easily thrust out one little finger, and inserting it in the handle, pull the light and unlatched door wide open. Nor does the doorkeeper show to the two or three visitors who are occasionally attracted to the apartment by curiosity. Within the room other officers, white in color or higher in rank, stand ready to prevent ladies from rushing forward to the bench of the judges or losing themselves among the lawyers within the bar. The sole business of that respectable colored man from 11 A. M. to 3 P. M., is to open a light door which shuts itself. Being a man of resources, he has provided himself with a chair and tied a string to the handle of his door. He goes to his place every morning holding his newspaper or book in one hand, and the end of his string with the other. When anyone approaches, he knows it by instinct, and gives the string a mechanical pull, without looking up or being mechanically aware that he has performed an official duty. Behold the typical man in him! He represents a class in Washington. He is one of the small sins which Congress permits and commits.
The sins of this kind which Congress commits are worse than those which it permits. After satisfying the curiosity of the ladies with a view of the Supreme Court—a work of three minutes—you naturally ascend to the gallery of the Senate. This is the paradise of doorkeeper. I think I counted fourteen doors to this gallery. There are doors which admit only ambassadors, doorkeeper's friends, and other privileged persons. There are doors which exclude the public from the reporters' gallery, writing-room, and telegraph office. There are many doors which admit ladies, and many more that open into the portions of the gallery used chiefly as a warning-place by unemployed negroes. Each of these doors consists of two leaves that swing together, and are kept shut by the attraction of gravitation. What a field for doorkeepering is here! At nearly every leaf of these numerous doors sits or stands a doorkeeper, his hand inserted in his brass loop—one man outside to let in the coming, and another inside to let out the departing guests. From their keeping such a tight clutch upon their hands, I think there must be more doorkeepering than there are doors. Every man seems afraid that if he should let go his handle another might get hold of it, and thus rob him of his slight pretext for being on the pay-roll. Half a dozen locks and a hundred latch-keys would deprive of all semblance of pretext the gentlemen who exclude the miscellaneous public from the Ambassadors' Gallery and the Reporters' apartments, and the rest of the door-keeping could be well done by two men. But that would never do in Washington. The pretext for being on the pay-roll is the very thing wanted.
If the visitor is rash enough to hint that two men to each door is rather a lavish expenditure of human force, considering the scarcity of labor on this continent, he is silenced by the question, "How could two or three or half a dozen men 'clear the galleries?' They could not. Nor could forty, if the auditors were determined to sit fast. But the Speaker's simple order, addressed to people habituated and wholly disposed to obey properly constituted authority, clears them with all requisite despatch. If not, there are thirty-three bored, yawning, inexpressible idle men about the Capitol, in blue uniform and stove-pipe hats, who are styled the Capitol police. They have a captain and two lieutenants, to head an onset upon a stubborn public which the Speaker might order, and it would relieve the monotony of their existence to be ordered upon any duty whatever.
Congress has, indeed, furnished itself most liberally with servants. The Senate, which consists of seventy-four members, is served by at least one hundred officers of all grades, from secretary to page. The House, which numbers two hundred and fifty-three members when the States are fully represented, has not less than a hundred and fifty officers, although the investigation does not find so many in the published list. We observe a considerable number of persons employed about the Capitol whose names elude the search of those who pore over the Blue Book of Mr. Disturnell, or the useful and excellent Congressional Directory of Major Ben Perley Poore. If we add to the officers employed about the two chambers the printers and binders who do the work of Congress in the public printing office, we shall find that Congress has many more servants than members. It may be that most of these are necessary. The Secretary of the Senate may require the assistance of twenty-one clerks. The heating apparatus of the Capitol may be of such a complicated and tremendous nature that it is as much as fourteen men can do to manage it. Members may read and consult such a prodigious number of books and documents as to need the assistance of more librarians than are employed in the Mercantile Library of New York, which has ten or twelve thousand subscribers, as well as an immense reading-room. Including the librarians of the library proper and those of the sub-libraries and document-rooms of the two houses, there are twenty-four persons in the Capitol supposed to be chiefly employed in ministering to the intellectual wants of members of Congress. All these persons may be indispensable, but they do not seem so to the casual observer. The casual observer receives the impression that the servants of Congress, like those of the Government generally, would be improved if two very simple and easy things were done—the salary of the chiefs doubled, and the number of their assistants reduced one half.

an impulse of benevolence, or in discharging a private obligation, at the cost of the public. Some time ago, General Grant chanced to be looking out of a window while a salute was firing in his honor, and he saw a man lose one of his legs by the bursting of a cannon. When the man had recovered his health, General Grant was President of the United States. What more natural than that the President should ask Mr. Bontwell to give the unfortunate man, if convenient, a watchman's place in the Treasury? He pitied the man, and he had the power to give him efficient relief at the public expense. Most men would have yielded to this impulse of benevolence, as General Grant did, and most men perhaps approved the act. Nevertheless, it is just in this way that the Capitol, the departments, the post offices, and the custom-houses get clogged with superfluous persons. It is just that un-logged incompetence pushes from its place two-legged ability. Some one, who cannot be refused, asks the appointment, and then one of two things must happen—either a man must be summarily and unhandsofly, if not inhumanly, thrust from his post, or two men must be set to doing one man's work. Generally, both these things are done. The two men go on for a while, until some new broom sweeps one or both away, to make room for the favorites of another irresistible personage.
An entertaining writer, some weeks ago, favored the public with reminiscences of former administrations, in order to show that the people cordially sustain a President who indulges his personal feelings at the people's cost. He told a story of General Jackson, which might have been true, the incident being entirely characteristic. "General," asked an old friend of the ex-President, at his Tennessee Hermitage, "tell me why you kept yourself and all your friends in trouble, through your first Presidential term, by keeping Mr. Gwynn Marshall of Mississippi?" To this General Jackson replied: "When my mother fled with me and my brother from the oppression of the British, who held possession of North Carolina, we were very poor. My brother had a long sickness (occasioned by a wound received from a British officer because he refused to do some menial service), and finally died. In the midst of our distress and poverty, an old Baptist minister called at our log-cabin, and spoke the first kind words my mother heard in her new home; and this good man continued to call, and he finally made our horse his lodging-place, and continued to prefer it, when better ones in the neighborhood were at his service. Years rolled on and this good man died. Well, sir, when the news was brought me that I was elected President, I put up my hands and exclaimed, 'Thank God for that, for it enables me to give the best office under the Government to the son of the old minister who was the friend of my mother, and of me in my youth; and I kept my promise, and, if it had been necessary, I would have sacrificed my office before he should have been removed.'
The feeling was natural and noble. The only question is, whether a man should be put at the expense of his country's services done to his mother. The relation of the anecdote appends to it this commentary:—"General Jackson was triumphantly re-elected to a second term." It is true; but it was in spite of such errors as this, not in consequence of them. Members of Congress who can remember that mad period of our political history will not justify personal government by the example of General Jackson.
Few of us, perhaps, have an adequate sense of the superior sacredness of public property to private, of public trusts to private. Little things betray our sluggish public conscience. No man, except a thief, would think of taking a sheet of postage-stamps from the desk of a banker or merchant; but in Washington it seems to be only men exceptionally honorable who scruple to use, or even to take, franked envelopes, which appear to be lying about everywhere. Still fewer have a proper sense of how much worse it is to steal from all their fellow-citizens than it is to steal from one of them. In everything relating to the Government, a citizen of the United States should feel that he is upon his most sacred honor. We are here in double trust. Our difficult and still doubtful experiment is for mankind as well as ourselves. I would not magnify a small sin into a great one; still less would I assume to be more virtuous than others; and yet it seems to me that a citizen of the United States should shrink from accepting a proffered frank as he would avoid touching only enough pitch to defile the tips of his fingers.
The reader has probably often asked himself, while wandering about the Capitol, what could possess Congress to throw away the public money upon some of those pictures that disgrace the Western Continent, and human nature generally, in the Rotunda. He has, perhaps, also, after giving up that conundrum, essayed to conjecture why no member has risen superior to the clamor of economists, and proposed an appropriation of two dollars to whitewash them from the view of mankind. It was hard enough to put them there; but to keep them visible, year after year, and give new commissions to painters who have painted them, are acts almost too abominable to be reckoned among the small sins of the national legislature.
Congress no doubt interpreted correctly the wishes of the people in making the Capitol stately and adorned; and it was an exquisite thought to adorn and decorate and complete it while the hosts of the Rebellion were entrenched within sight of its rising dome. Every building that belongs to the nation, every object that bears upon its surface the letters "U. S.," should have something in its style and appearance that will convey to the mind of the beholder a feeling of the imperial grandeur of the country's mission and destiny. Those stately and cheap sub-post offices in the city of New York, and those conspicuous and rusty, cast-iron lamp-post letter-boxes, and an almination in my eyes, not merely because they are sturdily inconvenient, but because they are men in appearance; because I desire that whenever American eyes rest upon an object bearing the stamp of the nation, they should rest upon something which they can contemplate with satisfaction and pride. Hence, it is always a pleasure to get round to the front of the Capitol, and turn away from the scaffolds, the shops, the sand-heaps, the general dilapidation and shabbiness of the region, and gaze for a while upon the magnificence of that vast range of architecture, with its awning-like flag above each wing, denoting that Congress is in session. In this brave attempt to express in marble the grandeur and glory of the United States, we see the prophecy of those chaster splendors, that simpler magnificence, which will enchant and exalt our grandchildren when they visit the future and final capital of the country. It was an excellent thing, perhaps, after all, to try our practice hand on

Washington, and exhaust all the possibilities of error there.
The interior of the Capitol is chaos, of course. That is unavoidable when a large building is erected over a smaller one. The visitor forgives and is amused at the labyrinthine intricacies in which he is continually lost; and when at last he stands beneath that beautiful dome, which hovers over him like an open balloon of silk illuminated by the sun, he experiences a general idea of the joy which the exterior affords him. Doubtless, we are running too much to domes, we are putting a dome over every building of much magnitude—it is such a fruitful source of contrasts. But this one justifies itself, and starts the coldest spectator into admiration. It was also a fine conception to place under it in that perfect light a series of large historical paintings. Nor was it necessary that they should be of the highest rank as mere works of art; because it is not certain that there are now living upon earth artists capable of executing paintings of that magnitude in a truly excellent manner. No artist in these times can get the many years of large practice which is necessary for the attainment of the large manner, and, I suppose, the best we can hope for, at present, in pictures of great size, is correct, refined, excellent scene-painting. But some of the paintings in the rotunda, besides being hideous as pictures, are historical falsehoods, which any school-boy might be able to detect at a glance. That one, for example, which is supposed to have been suggested by De Soto and his men discovering the Mississippi River—what a curiously ridiculous lie it is, with its display of superb costumes, its well-conditioned horses, and its plump cavaliers as fresh and gay, in their silk and velvet, as if they were careering in the streets of Madrid on a day of festival! What is better known than that these Spaniards reached the banks of the great river in woful plight after a wearisome march of many months through the wilderness? It is also particularly recorded that De Soto was sparing in expenditure for gay apparel, and that every rag of clothes, except what his followers wore, was burnt after one of their bloody encounters with the Indians. An hour's research in the library of Congress, under the intelligent guidance of the librarian, would have put the painter in possession of all the picturesque details of the real scene, and given him subjects for several pictures of peculiar interest. A picture could have been composed for that panel which would have such fascinating power as a mere exhibition of truth that few would have cared to criticize as a work of art.
But the question recurs, Why are such articles employed? The shameful answer is, because they lobby for a commission, and know how to lobby with effect. It is not an honest ignorance of art and history which has thus disgraced the Capitol; for these paintings are the constant theme of ridicule among members as they are among private citizens. One artist won his commission, it is said, by assiduous flattery of the wives and daughters of members of Congress. While artists of merit were toiling after excellence in distant studios, this wiser man in his generation was enjoying elegant leisure in the drawing-rooms of Washington, where he made sketches in the albums of ladies who could influence votes, or painted their portraits in some Italian or Spanish costume from his portfolio. He is thought to have secured votes by pretending that the excellent but not beautiful wife of a member of Congress reminded him constantly of an exquisite model he once had at Rome—one of the loveliest creatures in the world. He had, moreover, some little talent in small album-sketches and fancy little fancy portraits in costume. This, doubtless, deceived some members, who did not reflect upon the infinite difference between a grand historical painting and an imitation of the velvet in a cavalier's doublet. If that man's claim to the highest honor which the nation can bestow upon an artist had been openly discussed in committee, his name would never have reached the floor at all. It was plain lobbying that brought this dishonor upon an art, upon Congress, and upon the national taste.
It has been proposed to introduce the rule that no man shall be appointed to office who seeks office. Congress may rely with certainty the most complete upon this, that no artist capable of worthily filling one of the panels of the rotunda will ever lobby for the commission in the drawing-rooms of Washington. If that artist should ever be wanted, he will have to be looked for and solicited.
The reader has perhaps wondered also why Congress should have selected for the execution of the national statue of Abraham Lincoln, a person of no standing or experience as an artist. Miss Vinnie Ream is a young lady of perfect respectability, and, no doubt, highly estimable in her private relations. No one can blame her for her poor fortune. She has done little more than open her mouth and let the phony fall into it. But why Congress should have been a piece of work to be laid out—the statue of a man as little statuesque as any we can imagine—which required in the artist a combination of artistic skill and judgment, love of the man, and love of truth. The work was to be seen by hundreds who had been familiar with the subject, and by tens of thousands who would take an affectionate interest in the artist's management of its difficulties. The Abraham Lincoln of future generations was to be created. In the selection of the artist a national fame was either to be conferred or enhanced. Congress assigned this task to a girl who had the rudiments of her art still to learn, and who had given no proof of her capacity to receive those rudiments. She exhibited a model. It was about to be overlooked. She burst into the results for her were, a ten thousand dollar commission, a universal celebrity, and two years in Europe—three immense honors, either of which had been a requisite for long-tried excellence. And, as if it were not enough, a room was given her in the Capitol itself in which to execute and exhibit her work. Congress bestowed upon this unknown and untried child honors which it has persistently withheld from artists who have conferred upon the country whatever name it has in the world of art, but who hardly know the country in which they live. Recognition of every description for the country is proud! Such excellent does not have them? For when Congress confers distinction thus, it parts with its power to confer honor, and sensibly lessens its own.
Five minutes' conversation with Miss Vinnie Ream explains this ridiculous behavior of Congress. She is one of those graceful, animated, bright-eyed, picturesque, undaunted, twinkling little women, who can make men say 'Yes' to anything they ask. She was also a pretty blue, turban-like covering for her hair, which was killing at five paces; and there is that in her manner which puts men in the humor of uttering badinage, and at the same time

gives them the idea that she is a helpless little bird who would cry if she could not have her own way. The visitor to her room in the Capitol had but to stand apart and see the modest audacity of her demeanor, and observe the assured, lively manner in which she held a circle of men in conversation, in order to comprehend why Congress, in its easy, thoughtless good nature, should have granted to her the most signal honors it ever bestowed upon an artist.
Men are naturally susceptible to the picturesque in woman. It is natural also to feel like caressing and protecting whatever reminds us of tender, graceful childhood. Members had done well to give a private commission to this agreeable young lady by way of encouraging her to attempt acquiring some skill in modelling. But they were false to their trust when they gave her an important public work to execute. Men who are charged by their fellow-citizens with the adornment of national edifices and the bestowal of national honors are much to be blamed in allowing a blue turban, a pair of speaking eyes, a trim waist, and a fluent tongue to carry off prizes due only to tried merit. Members can form little idea of the dishonor, the contempt, which they bring upon Congress by indulging a whim of this kind. Millions witness the result; only a few individuals see the bright excuse; and of those few only one sex admits that it is any excuse at all.

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